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Camp Lejeune: LIFE and Leisure

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By Erin Ayers and Regina Edwards, Mental Health Department, Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune

Leisure time? Who has time for that?

As therapists at one of six [Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune](#) Mental Health clinics, we see service members working long hours, often consumed by their jobs and multiple deployments. One of our tasks is to bring balance into their lives by decreasing stress and anxiety through the alternative treatment method of recreational therapy.

Is it easy to change, given the level of military stress? No, but can we teach Marines and Sailors how to give it a try? Roger that!



Shown here are tools used in Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune's Mental Health Department Recreational Therapy group, Leisure Interventions and Functional Experiences (LIFE) program. LIFE is an 8-week, outpatient program that focuses on rehabilitation through active recreation and leisure pursuits.

The Leisure Interventions and Functional Experiences (LIFE) program is a leisure-focused outpatient program that we designed to maximize each service member's rehabilitation potential through active recreation and leisure pursuits. The LIFE group meets for 90 minutes, one day a week, for eight weeks. This recreation therapy group covers multiple topics, including: social skills, communications, leisure education, stress management, and coping skills. Goals include: improvement of free time and leisure planning, emotion regulation, and improvement of relationships between family and significant others. All games and activities done in the group have a therapeutic purpose behind them. To date, the group has seen more than 75

patients who were referred by their mental health provider and has been very well received across [Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune](#). A follow-up group was created for Marines and Sailors who requested additional time to receive this alternative therapy.

What is a recreation therapy group like? Almost all groups begin with an icebreaker activity. This helps get the group members talking, and it initiates creative thinking. The "Social Ball" is one of the best icebreaker activities that gets everyone out of their seats and answering

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uncommon questions. After the icebreaker, the group will play a game or do an activity that will focus on a topic such as stress management. One of the most popular games is “Play-doh Pictionary” which focuses on leisure education. During this game, group members take turns creating positive leisure activities out of play-doh for their team members to guess. Not only does this game give the service members ideas for leisure activities, it also works on team building and communication.

Not only is the group intended to help service members recover, it provides a time to forget about their stressors, relax, and laugh a little. Service members shared that they enjoy the activities that the group offers.

Are we going to make Marines and Sailors find their inner child? No, but it might be nice to remember some days when you were carefree – days without stress, time constraints, inspections and deployments. A respite time to learn skills and improve on some old ones is something worth considering.

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